



**Heritage Features
of
the Church
of
St John the Evangelist
Sandymount**

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

There are eleven stained glass windows in the Church of St. John the Evangelist. They are principally the work of Joshua Clarke & Sons of Dublin, Ward & Hughes of London and Earley & Co. of Dublin. The windows were the subject of a survey *Report on Stained Glass Windows* (2000) by Dr David Lawrence, extracts of which are here reproduced by kind permission of the RCB Library.

Window 1

Starting out at the North Chancel, the first window is titled *Phoebe*. It was executed by J. Clarke & Sons, Dublin with the inscription “A succourer of many”. The window is a memorial to “Dear Aunt Charlotte S.F. Houston, who fell asleep Aug 1879 aged 71 years. Erected by B.C. and R.A.L. D-H”. Charlotte Houston was the widow of Thomas Houston, Esq. D.L. of Connywarren, Co. Tyrone. In compliance with the terms of her will, Rev. Bennett Clear Davidson and his wife Rebecca Anne Louisa, assumed the additional surname of Houston, becoming Davidson-Houston. Rev. Davidson-Houston was incumbent at St John’s for some 35 years before his death in 1899.

Windows 2, 3 and 4

There are three windows in the Apse executed by Ward & Nixon or by Ward & Hughes of London representing nine scenes as follows: 2) *Raising of Jairus’ Daughter; Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes; Healing the Blind*. 3) *Last Supper; Christ’s Baptism; Christ Blessing Children*. 4) *Resurrection; Christ Bearing Cross; Nativity*.

The windows are of particular interest in that “There are not that many windows of the 1850s in Ireland and it is an era of great interest in the nineteenth-century revival of stained glass. The windows in the Apse are very good examples of the work of



either Ward & Nixon or possibly Ward & Hughes of this period. This well-known firm was set up by Thomas Ward (1808-1870) and James Henry Nixon (1822-1883) in about 1850. The windows are successful, with good drawing and colour range and interesting decorative work in the backgrounds: Charles Winston said that 'Ward was a master of ornament'. We have placed them in the first category of importance. The nine scenes in the three windows seem not to follow any logical order and one wonders whether, at some point, the sequence of medallions has become muddled."¹

Window 5

The *St. John the Evangelist* window is located in the Nave on the South Aisle. It was executed by Earley & Co. Dublin and it commemorates "Rev. Wm. De Burgh - C., 14 years incumbent of this Church. OB 15 Oct 1866 at 64 years. Erected by members of his congregation".

"The St. John the Evangelist window is interesting and successful and we have placed it in the second category of importance. The Dublin firm of Earley & Powell, later to become Earley & Co. had strong links with the prolific Catholic firm of John Hardman & Co. of Birmingham until 1852 and, for a while, Pugin's fourteenth-century style of figure drawing and drapery were continued by J.H. Powell (1828-1895), John Hardman's nephew. Thomas Earley undertook extensive work for Pugin and Henry Powell had worked for Hardman's.

"I do not know whether there were any formal business links between the Birmingham and Dublin firms but there are certainly stylistic similarities. The figure of St. John here is in the Pugin tradition, although the treatment of the sky background and the use of Romanesque ornamentation would be unusual for Hardman."²



St John the Evangelist Window

Window 6

Further along the South Aisle is the window representing *The Crucifixion*, executed by J. Clarke & Sons, Dublin with the inscription *Dolores nostros ipse portavit*. The window is a memorial to Edward John French, who died April 12 1930. He was a member of St John's vestry. A solicitor in the well-known practice of French and French, he lived at St Anne's, Donnybrook



Window 9

The next stained glass window is located further along on the West-end of the South Aisle and was executed by J. Clarke & Sons of Dublin. Dedicated to *St. Cecilia*, the patron saint of music, the window is a memorial to “Grace A. Wilkinson, sometime organist of this Church. Erected by sorrowing friends, Sept. 1896”.

Grace Anne Wilkinson née Scraggs, was the daughter of Matthew Robert Scraggs, MD of Clogher and wife of Rev Charles Frederick Wilkinson, Curate of this church from 1881 to 1900. Their only child Charlie was lost in a shipwreck in March 1895 off the coast of Australia.

Window 10

At right-angles to the *St. Cecilia* window on the South Aisle, West, is a memorial window *Walking on*

the Water, with the comforting words *It is I, be not afraid*. Executed by J. Clarke & Sons of Dublin

Beneath it is a memorial plaque that reads “In loving and sorrowful memory of our darling Charlie, ship ‘Menai’ of Liverpool, lost, with all his ship-mates in the South Pacific Ocean, March 1895”.

The window and the memorial plaque are to the memory of Charles Frederick Hoffman Wilkinson, who was lost when the Ship *Menai* sank in stormy seas in March 1895 off the Australian coast as she plied her way from Wellington in New South Wales to Capilla in Chile carrying coal. The *Menai* had originally sailed out of Liverpool under Capt John Farrell. Built in 1880 and weighing some 1,435 tons, she was no match for the waves that engulfed her. All on board perished.



Charlie was the only child of the Rev Charles Frederick Wilkinson, Curate of this church from 1881 to 1900, and his wife Grace Anne. They married on 14th July 1870 in St. Peter's, Dublin. Charlie was born on 20th June 1873 in Newry, when his father was Curate at St. Patrick's there. Charlie was twenty-one years old when he died. Mrs. Wilkinson died the following year on 19th September, aged 51, and was buried from her residence at 125 Strand Road, Sandymount. Poignantly, the memorial window erected to her memory was placed next to Charlie's memorial in the same corner of the Church.

Rev. Wilkinson was born in Tipperary, the son of Charles Wilkinson, Merchant. He was ordained in 1871 and served as Curate in Altedesart (Armagh), Newry, Ballymore (Armagh) and St. John's in Sandymount. He was an Honorary Minor Canon at Christ Church Cathedral from 1890 to 1891. Other appointments included Acting Chaplain to the Forces and to Portobello Barracks, and Cathechist at the Dublin Board of Education and Marlborough Street Training College. He died on 22nd November 1919, aged 80, at his lodgings in Catherine Villas, Merrion.

Window 13 and 14

Moving to the Nave North Aisle, are two memorial windows dedicated to "Revd. B.C. Davidson Houston, M.A. 35 years Vicar of this Church. Ob Aug 30 1899 at 62 years. Erected by members of his congregation". Both were executed by J. Clarke & Sons of Dublin. The first represents *Christ in Gethsemane*, while the second depicts *Angel and Women at the Tomb*.

Window 15

The final window, also by J. Clarke & Sons of Dublin, is located at the Eastern end of the North Aisle. Inscribed *Jesus called a little child*, the window commemorates "W.R. Davidson. Nov 11th 1871 - Aug 20th 1872", the son of the second vicar of St. John's, Rev. B.C. Davidson-Houston, who is commemorated in windows 13 and 14.

Joshua Clarke & Sons of Dublin

"It was interesting to find such a large number of windows by Joshua Clarke and Sons of Dublin. Joshua who was born in Leeds and had set up his business in Dublin in 1886, was the father of the stained-glass artist Harry Clarke. His work is primarily of interest in setting Harry's work in context and determining what formative influence, if any, it may have had on the young Harry.

"The relationship between the two men, in particular Harry's high regard both for his father and for the firm, are well documented in Nicola Gordon Bowe's book *The Life and Work of Harry Clarke*. Harry seems to have expressed no adverse criticism of his father's work, but his style and approach are so totally different from those of his father's studio that one can propose that, to some extent, he must have reacted against the firm's work.

Joshua Clark's studio was able to come up with a wide range of styles, each closely related to other, rather better known, large trade-firms of the time. For example Window 6 - *The Crucifixion*, was thought by some to be by Mayer & Co. of Munich but

then was deemed to be an example of Clarke's 'Mayer style'. Again, Window 9 - *St. Cecilia*, is virtually indistinguishable from Mayer.

A likely explanation of Clarke's ever-changing style is his apparent use of a large number of free-lance designers and these could well have been people who had experience working for firms such as Mayer & Co., Hardman & Co. and so on. Along with the range of styles goes considerable variation in the quality and success of the designs and this is clearly demonstrated in the windows here at St. John's.

One has to say that the windows made in imitation of Mayer are to be viewed as pastiche and they do not have the refinement or mastery of the genuine Mayer studio. One always suspected that, in common with other trade-firms, Joshua Clarke would have re-used cartoons, in the sense that the same window would appear at a number of churches, but it was instructive to have evidence of this. The *Angel and Women at the Tomb* window appears in a virtually identical version at Christ Church, Dun Laoghaire. Both windows are based on a well-known painting by the Swedish painter Axel Herman Haig (1853-1921), best known for the topography and etching he did for the architect William Burges (1827-1881)" ³



Notes

1. From *Report on Stained Glass Windows*, Copyright RCB Dr. David Lawrence (2000)
2. Ibid
3. Ibid.

Sources:

Register of Merchant Navy Seamen Lost at Sea, National Archives, Kew.
Canon JB Leslie and WJR Wallace, *Clergy of Dublin and Glendalough*,
The General Register Office, Dublin
The Internet